rupted by campfires—sometimes lonely flashes of light, sometimes large clusters of fires in the distant gloom. These were the camps of deserters on their way home. Not infrequently a rifle was discharged in the direction of my car. More often the soldiers around the fire would merely raise their rifles and take aim, as an unfriendly but not necessarily threatening gesture. They knew that the only car traveling at night was that of the Commissar of the Front.

One night my car got stuck in knee-deep mud. The chain on one of the rear wheels broke. The chauffeur and his helper tried to replace it. I joined them. The mud was icy. Three fires were blinking among the trees not far from the road and illumined the figures of men moving in front of them. I said to the chauffeur, "We cannot spend the night here. I'll ask for help."

He replied, "I'd rather sleep in the mud."

I climbed the slope from the road to the forest and approached the nearest campfire. Stern, bearded faces turned toward me, but when I stepped closer nobody so much as looked at me or answered my greeting. I said to the soldiers, "I am the Commissar of the Front, Woytinsky. My car is stuck. Will you give me a hand?"

After a long silence, a middle-aged man, looking more like a muzhik than a soldier, replied, "We know who you are and why you drive at night. You don't think of us common men any longer. You don't help us. Why should we help you?"

I felt humiliated and said angrily, "I also know who you fellows are and why you are here. Yet I have asked you for help. You refuse. Now I'll ask you in another way. Who wants to earn ten rubles for vodka?"

In the uncertain light of the fire it seemed as if the muzhik looked at me with sad reproach. Then he got up. His voice was flat and cheerless when he asked his companions, "Should we help the Commissar? He wants to treat us to vodka." Nobody moved. Then the muzhik said with a sigh, "Let's see what his trouble is. And you, lads," he shouted to the men around the next fire, "come with us." A score of soldiers in ragged, soiled coats, some dragging their rifles, came down to the road, scowling at me.

All four wheels of the car were sunk deep in the mud. The soldiers surrounded the car and began to shake it, trying to pull it out of the hole. They worked in silence, without the usual jokes, knee-deep in water. I worked with them. When at last the car was on firm ground, I thanked the men and handed a ten-ruble note to the bearded muzhik. He pushed my hand back. "Keep your money, Comrade Commissar. Do you think we helped you for the tip? This is what you, an educated gentleman, think of us. And we, simple people as we are,